

Both Vt. Senators oppose anti-flag burning amendment

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MONTPELIER, Vt. --Both of Vermont's U.S. Senators voted against the constitutional amendment to ban flag burning that failed in the Senate by one vote Tuesday.

The amendment needed two-thirds of the Senate to pass, and failed on a 66-34 vote.

"Members of the military put their lives on the line every day to defend the rights guaranteed by the United States Constitution," said Sen. James Jeffords, a 30-year veteran of the Navy and Naval Reserve. "It is disrespectful of these sacrifices to desecrate the flag.

"However, in my opinion, our commitment to free speech must be strong enough to protect the rights of those who express unpopular ideas, or who choose such a distasteful means of expression. This concept is at the core of what we stand for as Americans."

Sen. Patrick Leahy, D-Vt., accused the Republican majority in the Senate of playing politics with the Constitution.

"Like the marriage amendment, the flag amendment would artificially create division among the American people," Leahy said. "The timing of this consideration, four months before the midterm election, raises concerns, again, that the Constitution is being misused for partisan purposes. That is wrong." ■